BLACK ORPHEUS

A JOURNAL OF AFRICAN AND AFRO-AMERICAN LITERATURE

1971
KRAUS REPRINT
Nendeln

Reprinted by arrangement with Mbari Artists and Writers Club, Ibadan, Nigeria.

KRAUS REPRINT
A Division of
KRAUS-THOMSON ORGANIZATION LIMITED
Nendeln/Liechtenstein
1971

Printed in Germany
Lessingdruckerei Wiesbaden

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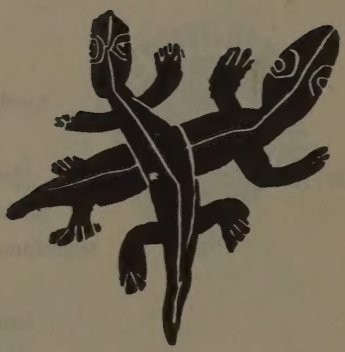


AKAN POETRY

BY KWABENA NKETIA

THE POETIC TRADITION

In Akan society[1], literary activity has, until recently, been carried on largely by word of mouth. The texts of Akan poetry, therefore, occur as language events, and some forms of it are not always readily recognised as poetry by those not thoroughly acquainted with our poetic tradition. Moreover the use of poetic expressions is not peculiar to the poem. The very names which are given to people in Akan society, and the praise appellations which are constantly used in familiar and emotional situations have the feel of poetry:

"One who is restive until he has fought and won".

"Dwentiwaa's husband, and a man of valour".

"Daughter of a spokesman who is herself a spokesman".

"Osafo the tall one, Noble Gyamfi Agyei"

"Kumi Sasraku, a man feared by other men".

"Kusi that fells the tree of the cedar, noble Apea Kusi".

"Karikari that weighs gold and gives it away, the benevolent one".

"Dako that crowns Kings, that burns the watery shrub".

These, and many others have a highly evocative power for the Akan. No one says the chief has died if he knows our poetic habits. He says 'the chief has gone to his village'. Incidence of hardship is described in terms of 'fire in the house going out.'

Similarly the use of proverbs—most of which are to my mind poetic expressions of a gnomic type—is not confined to the poem to which they lend their peculiar terseness by reason of their imagery. They are quoted in many situations—in the home, at work, at the court — wherever men engage in verbal exchanges, wherever advice, warning, or address is given. They are considered a mark of eloquence and wit, and anyone who is able to quote or use proverbs habitually and is able to give freshness to words through the striking ways in which he uses them in collocations may be regarded as a poet of a sort.

Poetic expressions, therefore, abound in the language of ordinary social intercourse and in narrations and speeches. The speeches of the spokesmen of

1. The Akan peoples of Ghana include the Ashanti, Fanti, Akim, Kwahu, Akwapim and Asen etc.

chiefs (commonly called linguists) on important occasions when they display their powers of rhetoric, are full of such expressions. But there is nowhere that their use is sustained to the level of a creative art as we find in the poem. It is in the poem, therefore, that the poetic tradition of the Akan is best developed. All references to poetry, poetic tradition in this paper will refer specifically to the poem.

By way of illustration, let me give a few examples of the differences between ordinary language events and the poem.

Let us take greetings for instance. Like other African peoples the Akan are particular about their social greetings. There are greetings for different people as well as greetings for various social situations; greetings to the newly born baby, to the bereaved, to the person who has been particularly lucky, and so on. These greetings usually consist of a short sentence or two and lack the marks of a literary form, and have no aesthetic value for us, although they are socially important.

On the other hand, the same material could be worked out in a literary form, as in the following text of greetings to the chief of an Akan state on the occasion of the New Year:

The year has come round.
I have come to greet you,
To shower blessings on you.
Live long, live long, live long,
Live to a good old age.
The drummer of the talking drums says,
He showers his blessings on you.
Live long; live long; live long.
Live to a good old age.
The God of old, says,
He showers his blessings on you.
Live to a good old age, chief,
The Earth Amponyinamoa, says,
She showers her blessings on you.
Live to a good old age.
Live long, live long, live long.
Live to a good old age.
May years be added to your years.

The utterances of the text I have just quoted are short and are rather like the texts of ordinary social greetings. The same kind of language material is used:

Live long;
May years be added to your years,

but in a more elaborate form, and with additional expressions and repetitions not common in everyday greetings. There is a definite pattern which unfolds itself as the text enlarges. In the way it is arranged, it carries a far greater emotional force and aesthetic merit. A study of Akan poetry shows a common interest in the dialogue and the report. Recitals of speeches in character or dialogues occur as forms of oral literature, particularly in the Akan saga, the *anansesem* in the form of prose or poetry.

Here for example is a song interlude in an Akan folktale in the form of a short dialogue :

Rat, I sympathise with you.
She replies: Akuaa Tonkuro,
I crack a nut and down my throat it goes.
Says she: *Tanseserewa*, I sympathise with you:
She replies : I thank you, sister.
I thank you friend.
I *Tanseserewa Amoaforo Adufa*,
Hated seven times thirty,
I whom others wish dead and yet live,
Agyaa Tenkorankye Abenaa,
I told you to marry me that I may also marry you,
For it is the ripe black pepper that spices
the soup well.
Fowls, do they ever sleep?
Grandsire, I am not asleep.
Grandsire, I am not asleep.
Haven't you seen that the waters after the rain
Have taken the precious bead far away?
That poor but nice and handsome man?
Darkness has fallen over us.
Shout out, gang of hunters:
Hobaa,
Hoo.

The logical sequence of the utterances in the piece just quoted is different from that of the prose narrative. The development of dialogue is rather different The language is full of imagery. ...

Hated seven times thirty,
The ripe black pepper spices the soup well;
(imagery of the proverb)
The precious bead taken by the waters after the rain.
Darkness has fallen over us.

The whole structure of the piece impresses one with its literary vision.

A further set of examples may be taken from the language events of ceremonial occasions. We often like to comment on events of such nature or to describe them to others who may be interested or who ought to know about them. Such accounts whether of marriage customs or of funerals and other observances are rarely developed in poetic style, and are themselves not considered as texts of oral literature though they could provide material for oral literature—material for the creation of texts of artistic merit. The proceedings ot these occasions, however, may include songs, chants and prayers, which show a depth of poetic vision. For example the funeral provides an occasion for reciting pieces such as the following :

Grandsire Gyima with a slim but generous arm,
Fount of satisfaction,
My friend Adu on whom I depend,
I depend on you for everything, even for
drinking water.
If I am not dependent on you, see what has become of me.

Atlhough a man, you are a mother to children,
A man who takes another's child for his own,
Who builds mighty but empty houses,
Who is restive until he has fought and won,
Osibirekuo, Gyane the short one,
Dwentiwaa's husband, and a man of valour.

The example I have just quoted is from my book on 'Funeral Dirges of the Akan People' in which annotated texts of about 114 of such texts are given. Proper names, by-names, praise appellations are used in their poetic contexts and provide the centre of a sustained poetry of a highly evocative nature. Statements, quotations of speech such as one would meet in ordinary speech are drawn upon: "I depend on you for everything". Yet each tells a story in its own way, a story of deeply emotional character to those who are familiar with the facts alluded to in the poems.

There is then at the level of listening a clear distinction between ordinary language events and creative language events, ordinary language texts of social intercourse and creative texts which while making use of the same or nearly the same verbal resources as the language of social intercourse show a sustained artistic purpose.

The poetic tradition of the Akan may appear diffuse in its application in so far as poetic expressions may be incorporated into the language of narratives and statements. But this is merely an indication of the high level to which the art of poetry has been developed in our preliterate societies as folk art, and the extent to which people are aware of it.

Apart from the verbal content which gives the poem its peculiar character, there are also various formal usages—artistic uses of sound sequences, rhythm, tone, repetitions—which help to mark the poem out and which define its artistic purpose.

The texts of Akan poetry are generally made up of units of utterances which are delimited from each other by a number of prosodic features: pause or stop, end particles, occasional end patterning—frequently of a tonal type:

Odómoakyi Amankwaa Kyíkyiikyi
Oyée saa maa patuo bewuu anopatútuutu
Gyamfradú Gyamerá ara ne no.
Odómoakyi Amankwaa Kyíkyiikyi
Who made the owl die very early in the morning,
It is Gyamfradú Gyamerá.

Note the high tone beginnings and endings (marked with acute accent). There is a marked prosodic arrangement of sound sequences in the piece. This arrangement is interesting in itself and impresses one with its 'music' — the beauty of the sounds. It is something one can enjoy without understanding a word of the poem, when one listens to it.

Or take the following example:

Asó mo mo mó
Mmmerenkensóno mo mo mó
Asó na ate asém:
Mmerenkensóno anya bí akeka.

Thank you Ear,
Thank you sprouting Palm Branch.
It is Ear that heard it
And gave Palm Branch food for gossip.

Again note the high endings.

Such stretches of utterances which I shall refer to subsequently as linear units may be in the nature of 'complete sentences' or phrases or even single words.

When I examined the texts of Akan dirges, I found that within themselves linear units were not bound by uniform syllabic patterns, although they were rhythmic and showed certain artistic features. Examination of other texts has shown that these observations are of wide application. Syllabic stress is unimportant. The distribution of syllable types follows no even pattern. Short and long syllables follow each other in unrestricted patterns. The idea of the small metrical foot of classical and modern European languages is foreign to our conception of prosody. This is to be expected since our music is rhythmically different and has a different conception of durational order.

Instead of the foot, there is a rhythmical distribution of recurring main beats or tones on syllables separated from each other by one or more syllables. The constituents of a linear unit may be grouped in terms of this distribution as in the following example with two main beats to the line (indicated by acute accents).

Wóanware me a, obí aware me.
Fé na eyo énye aniwu.
Wó dee wompe me a, obí dee ope me.
Fé na eyo énye aniwu.
Obirebe senkye,
Ope asém suro asem, Nyame na obebua no.
Kókosakyi odí aman adee,
Adú Gyamfí,
Opé yedi no odó.

If you wont marry me, someone else has married me.
It is meet and proper: it is not shameful.
If you don't want me, someone else does.
It is meet and proper: it is not shameful.
Obirebe senkye,
That bird is inquisitive but fears to get involved.
I leave it to God to give him the answer.
The vulture that eats the things of all,
Adu Gyamfi,
Wanting a person springs from love.

Such beats or tones may fall at regular intervals, or in irregular intervals according to the effect desired. Regularity is lyrical, while irregularity has a dramatic force. There are a few variations to both types. For example a regular two beat distribution may be varied at some points by one or three beat distribution, and so on.

When the poem is taken as a whole, one would find scattered uses of prosodic devices: occasional alliteration, repetition of whole syllables, words or even phrases and so on. Diffusion rather than concentration tends to be the guiding principle in the use of such prosodic forms. This has the effect of arousing interest at various points in a poem and avoids the monotonous effect of persistent jigging or persistent trot in the poem.

There is flexibility of form, which in the Akan conception, is secondary to poetic expression. Versification is in itself an interesting pastime, and there are many rhythmic chants, but these are for the entertainment of the young who must be led through such forms to appreciate our peculiar use of rhythm in poetry and music, particularly in drumming.

Here are a few examples of those verses. Most of them contain a number of nonsense words. These nonsense words are used mainly because of their rhythmic or prosodic interest.

Kyankyenankyankyena,
Opanin didi oyi ayowa.

If an elder eats all the food,
He does the washing up himself.

Kofi oo,
Di afoofi oo,
Ka twene oo,
Ma nkoko mmesa.
Kenkenka, nkoko mmesa.

Kofi, take a holiday.
Beat the drum,
That the fowls may dance.

Dee me kon do ne apotonsu,
Mepoto mepoto a, mepoto megu mu.

What I love to eat is a meal of corn:
When I squash it and squash it,
I do so in the bowl.

Nkontommire ba e, honton.
Adi-nam-adi-nkyene-ba na akyekyeremokyee.

Child of cocoyam leaves, plump and robust.
Child of meat and salt is weak and lean.

Apitie Kwakye e,
    Sensisen:
Ogyamma abere o,
    Sensisen.
Na bra bedi oo
    Sensisen.
Kyeekyee twootwoo.
    Sensisen.

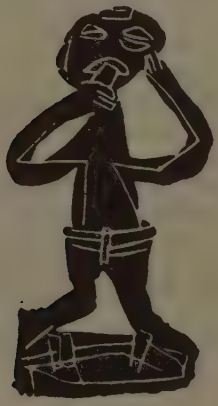
Woodpecker,
The berries of Ogyamma are ripe.
Quick! Come and eat them
Kyeekyee twootwoo the bird sings.

Kankantwirede, kankantwirede,
Mfa mmo ho mmo ho.
Kankantwirede, kankantwirede.
Mede mebo mebo.
Kankantwirede, kankantwirede.

Don't smash it, don't smash it.
Kankantwirede, kankantwirede.
I'll smash it, I'll smash it.
Kankantwirede, kankantwirede.

It is difficult to convey the rhythmic impression in the translations. Indeed the prosodic features of our poetry are untranslatable.

In the examples I have just quoted, all the emphasis is on rhythm because they are meant for children or for verbal entertainment. Although rhythm is important in all poetry, serious poetry tends to use forms in which the verse structure is steady or flowing but not obstrusive.



DEVELOPMENT OF STYLE

The development of the poetic tradition of the Akan appears to have followed four distinct courses, each one giving rise to a distinctive style of arrangement or delivery.

ORAL POETRY. First there is tradition of Oral Poetry or poetry which is recited and not sung. The greatest use of this is in connection with chiefship. At state functions special poems of praise are recited by minstrels who also act as masters of ceremonies to paramount chiefs. In these poems allusions to past successes in war, particularly the decapitations of enemy chiefs and potentates in which these masters of ceremonies are interested as state executioners are made. They are intended to remind the chief of his former enemies or the enemies of his predecessors, to remind him of his power as war leader, and to incite him to similar deeds of bravery.

In these the chief is one who has an oath that should not be taken lightly.
He is one who hates to see an enemy return victorious.
He delivers old and young from the ravages of war.
He is one of whom armies of enemies get tired.
He is bullet proof: when you fire at him, you waste your ammunition.
He is so powerful as to be able to bring the divinations of priests to naught.
He catches priests and snatches their bells from them.
He is not to be challenged. If anybody dares him, the one is sure to lose his head.
He cannot be caught and decapitated at the battle front.
He is like the tough trees, as well as the old, wet half dead tree neither of which can be cut.

The delivery of the poems is very dramatic and expressive. There may be an introductory exclamatory lead: He is the one *(ono no)*, or a simple interjection for calling attention: *odee e!*

Where the poem begins with a name or appellation or some such reference, it may be followed by a prolonged exclamation on the particle of address *ee*. This opening may be repeated.

The rest of the poem follows straight on in short or long utterances, some of which are dramatically hurried or spoken very deliberately according to the dramatic effect required. The person reciting the poem half covers his mouth with his left hand as he points the sword which he holds in his right hand to the chief in front of whom he stands to perform. This heightens the dramatic effect.

The actual patterns of the poem may be in the form of cumulative utterances or a dialogue.

He is the one!
O father wake up.
What is it, my child?
It is the Toucans crying.
Really!
You are good boy to mistake the horns[1] of
Amaniampong for the crying of Toucans.
Don't be too quick to shoot at a great man.
Before you can fire, he snatches your powder.

He says: Help! Help!
He says: Akosua, Adwoa!
Quick, get me my torch.
What is it, she asks?
He replies, Is it not what happened the other day
that has happened once more?
Again? This child is really a child!
When I was a mighty one, I could not overthrow him.
The mighty one could not overthrow him.
The entangling one could not overthrow him.
Aku that eats the snails of little children.

When each such poem is being recited, there is always a tense atmosphere which is relieved at the end of each poem by drums and horns which play an interlude while the minstrels get ready to recite the next.

RECITATIVE. The second tradition is that of verse which is half spoken and half sung—the recitative style used in dirges and the poetry of hunters' celebrations.

In dirges and in the elegies of court minstrels (Kwadwomfoo) a number of references are made which are grouped around a few themes: the theme of the Ancestor, the theme of the deceased or any particular individual, the theme of place of domicile. To these are added a number of reflections and messages such as the following:

What were your wares that they are sold out so quickly?
This death has taken me by surprise.
When father meets me, he will hardly recognize me:
For he will meet me carrying all I have:
A torn sleeping mat and a horde of flies.

The night is fast approaching
Where the orphan is dying to see its mother.

The significance of the various themes and the verbal resources by means of which they are conveyed have been dealt with in my book on Funeral Dirges. The poetic forms that are used, the four stylistic arrangements of the dirge and the drama of its delivery have also been dealt with.

The interesting thing about the dirge is that there is a set of poems suitable for every Akan person according to his clan or immediate kinship affiliations or the name he bears which in the past indicated his *Ntoro*. For example, Boakye, Boahene, Dua etc. would be Bosompra group, while Apea, Apea Kusi would be Bosomtwe. (See BUSIA, "The Ashanti" in *AFRICAN WORLDS* (O.U.P.) p. 199). There is a variety of styles, some more elevated than others, styles varying in the scope they give for spontaneity of expression and for declamations.

A few examples may be of interest. They are chosen from the collection above mentioned.

← 1. These are musical horns made out of the tusks of elephants. In Akan society only paramount chiefs possess ensembles of such horns. Amaniampong is described as the subtantative foundr of the state of Mampong Ashanti.

First poem emphasising the theme of Ancestor:

Grandsire Opon Sasraku,
I ask you to help me in clearing the forest to make a farm.
Then I ask you to help me in felling the trees on the farm.
Then I ask you to help me in making mounds for the yam seeds.
But for harvesting the yams, I do not need your help,
Your subjects, male and female alike, are terrible suckers.
Opon's grandchild who hails from Danyase and drinks Tefufu and
Akonoma.

Now two poems about the same man, but with different degrees of spontaneity.

I do not mean Amoanimaa of Dwaben.
I mean Adwoa Boanimaa of Bekwae.
Boatitiri Dadeako,
She hails from Dwobino in Bekwae.
It is the Priest that is fighting so desperately
Like one hemmed in on all fours.
Boatitiri Dadeako,
Grandchild of the priest hails from the priestly bower.
Owusu, grandchild of Akuamoa,
Father,
It is my end, today!

Valiant Owusu,
The stranger on whom the citizen of the town depends,
Father allow my children and me to depend on you,
So that we may all of us get something to eat,
Father on whom I wholly depend.
When Father sees me, he will hardly recognize me.
He will meet me carrying an old torn mat and a horde of flies.
Father with whom I confer,
My children and I will look to you,
Father on whom I wholly depend.
Killer-of-hunger,
My saviour,
Father the slender arm full of kindness,
Father the rover whose footprints are on
all paths.

The recitatives of hunters' celebrations are partly dirge-like and partly heroic, for the celebrations usually take place in connection with the funerals of elephant hunters, or on occasions when hunters succeed in killing elephants. The delivery is usually fast, the emphasis being on the continual flow of utterances which need not be linked by any apparent intellectual thread, but which are united by their cumulative emotional effects. The recitative ends with a little refrain which is taken at a much slower pace. The sequences of utterances may be simple or they may be in the form of a dialogue.

Father has asked me to come with him:[1]
Grandfather, please, arm me.
Grandfather has asked me to come with him.
Father, please, arm me.

Little wise one, what are you doing
up on the roof tumbling things down?
I am looking for salt and pepper.[2]
Whatever for?
To win honour.
It is for winning honour that one takes salt and pepper.
Gyaakyeamo![3] I am calling Kwasi Febriri Kae.
Dependable, I shall accompany him,
Yentemadu[3] is his name.
Hail him.
One who says and does it,
It is father.

What should father send me?
Let Father send me venison.
What should father send me?
Let father send me the foot of an animal,
For nowadays I do not see any sign of him.
He asked: And who are you?
Says he: I am the little one that lays elephants low.
It is animals that trade in baskets.[4]
Father caught some for us.
Again he asks. And who are you?
Says he: Is it not I, grandchild of Kyirebi Ansa of Nkwatia?
Grandchild of Owiafe Akenten of Taferewaso,
It is father that drinks Apaaku and purifies himself in the river
inhabited by crocodiles.[5]
Again he asks: May I know who you are?
I am the grandchild of Adokwaabo of Abetifi.
It is he that drinks Sunsu and purifies himself in Paha.
Obere is no good.
Akwasi Yentimi, Obere is no good.
If I do not come with you,
Do not forget to send me venison.

LYRIC POETRY. The third tradition of poetry in Akan society is the lyric tradition: the use of the song as a vehicle for poetry. The individual items maintained in this tradition constitute the bulk of Akan poetry.

It must of course not be assumed that every kind of song has a worthy poetry or that the words of every song constitute a fully developed poem. Some songs are fragmentary though sometimes such fragments are terse and poetically interesting. It is difficult to translate them briefly so as to convey their implications. Here are a few examples.

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1. Elephant hunters usually erect cottages in the middle of the forest where they stay for short periods and hunt. They usually live in these colleges with boys in training or servants who carry the meat to nearby markets.
2. i.e. The essential commodities which a hunter requires for living away from humanity.
3. Strong name of the hunter Kwasi Febrisi Kae. For the relevance of such names see NKETIA, J. H.: 'Funeral Dirges of the Akan People' pp. 30-33.
4. A poetic reference to the work of a hunter's attendants or servants who carry the animals he kills to nearby markets.
5. For the significance of these references to ancestry, drinking water, purification see NKETIA, 'Funeral Dirges of the Akan People' pp. 19-43.

What good is the wood pecker to be used in the soup?
A great bird has been left behind on the other side of the river.
Wayside palm tree, I have grown a multitude of branches.
Who will reap my nuts when I am dead and gone?
Little beetle,
My head has no thinking-cap.
I have searched for one, but without avail.

Such examples could be multiplied. They increase the value of a song to the hearers because of their emotional appeal.

Differences in the seriousness of the poetry of various songs must also be noted. Songs of insult, heroic songs, song interludes in folk tales etc. tend to be conceived rather differently. One will find humour, sarcasm, pathos in different songs.

There is no uniformity of themes in the poems of the lyric tradition, for the songs are used in different contexts. Songs of worship, songs for particular ceremonies make their peculiar references on which students of society draw for evidence or more frequently for corroboration, references which the philosopher considers when setting up his postulates.

But the cultural value of these songs is not merely that they provide such data. Indeed sometimes the references may appear to be contradictory as anyone who is familiar with our proverbs—the material of poetry—would know. For those who use them and those who listen to them in the variety of contexts in which they are used, they are more than repositories of dogma, or indices of history. The experience of listening to them or of performing them is unique and satisfying. They are statements of the poet, reflections of his vision and of his response or reactions to individuals in his society and to nature. They are first and foremost poetry. Indeed it requires the philosopher or the student of society depth of poetic imagination to appreciate the poetic meaning of the references which he abstracts. He must needs be a poet of a sort to appreciate the poetic use of TE 'hearing' for 'perception' in general, the poetic use of ANANSE, the hero in our folk tales for 'wisdom', the poetic use of 'ODOMANKOMA' a byname of the creator for creativeness, the poetic use of KUNU 'husband' for describing the relation between worshippers and the objects of worship, the poetic uses of ADU, DAMFO ADU to show dependence, and so on. The poem is not always so straightforward as to provide ready-made answers, a consistent dogma. Indeed quite often the poem itself has to be referred to the oral traditions of history, belief etc. for illumination.

The structure of lyric poems is greatly influenced by the musical requirements. Songs performed by individuals tend to have a sustained verse form with the minimum of wholesale repetitions, whereas those sung by solo and chorus tend to have some phrases repeated over and over again.

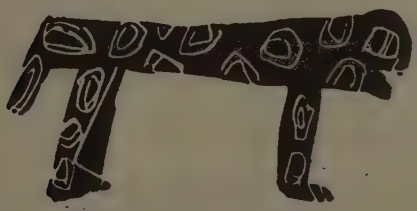
In general the sequences of "utterances" closely follow the musical phrases. In some songs this is regular; in others however phrases of unequal lengths are used.

Examples of the poems in this tradition will be selected from various lyric types.

SONGS OF PRAYER, EXHILARATION AND INCITEMENT. The lyrics in this group are performed by bands of women on occasions when chiefs are deposed or installed and in times of war and other emergencies.

Let us pray to God for the King.
Let us pray for a shower of blessing.
Chief of the Ring Wing and kinsman of
    Boaten of Woonoo, Akuamoa of Kyerekyere,
When he was opening his new palace,
He caused cattle to be slaughtered
    for inhabitants of the town.
He gavè to the women, presents of sheep.
Guard of the roads that lead to Sekyere.
Hunter, Baa Asiemmiri, father the watch dog,
Brother of Tonsa and Badu,
I shall never cease to thank him,
Owusu that knows something.
Let us pray to God for him.
Amankwaa,
Kinsman of the lord of Botoku
    for whom the Mpintin drums play,
Is Amankwaa not coming to sing for
    Chief Adu, the generous giver?
My eyes are looking at the roads in expectation.
What are my ears going to tell me ?*
Amankwaa,
Kinsman of Tuo Brobe of Sekyere,
Is Amankwaa not coming to sing for
    Chief Adu that scatters presents?
My eyes are looking at the roads in expectation.
What are my ears going to tell me?

These two verses are said to have been composed by a woman called 'Agyakoma' and Amankwaa were married to the same man. (In Akan Society polygamy is permitted.)



CRADLE SONGS. Introduction to the language of poetry begins very early in life—in the cradle—long before one is able to understand the language of social intercourse. Anyone who has watched the homely situation of the mother and her child wrapped up this 'music of words' will find that the child derives a great deal of pleasure from it. The tune, the sound sequences which form the words, and most important of all the rhythm evoke responses from the child, responses of excitement or of calm and repose which lull it to sleep. Accordingly many cradle songs exploit the "prosodic features" of verse, making use of nonsense words of musical interest to the child.

There are, however, other cradle songs which while aiming at sound sequences of interest build up statements of wider meaning to the mother or older infants who are learning to speak and who may still be entertained with such songs. Having regard to the infant, therefore, composers of cradle songs use subjects of interest—food and games, parents, activities or forms of behaviour with which the child is familiar particularly those through which it learns to express pleasure or pain, joy or anger.

In these songs there is always scope for the reflections of the mother or nurse, for allusions to the co-wife of a polygamous marriage, allusions to the treatment meted out to the woman by the husband. Cradle songs, therefore, can be as satisfying to the child as to the mother.

Little child, come for a feed.
If you divorce me, you cannot take away my child.
Little one, come for a feed.

If you are hungry, cook yourself a meal.
Why do you cry?
You are the child of a yam farmer,
Why do you cry?
You are the child of a cocoyam farmer,
Why do you cry?

Someone would like to have you for her child
But you are my own.
Someone wished she had you to nurse you on a good mat;
Someone wished you were hers: she would put you on camel blanket;
But I have you to rear you on a torn mat.
Someone wished she had you, but I have you.

Who took away my child?
Is the one who took away my child a woman or a man?
If a woman, she would know what it means to deliver a baby.
Kwakye's child,
I am anxious and troubled.
Kwakye's child,
I am anxious and troubled.

SONGS FROM FOLK TALES. The poetry of song interludes in folk tales is interesting. Some of the verses are short, sometimes with lines of nonsense syllables thrown on in account of their prosodic interest. Others are long and

specially constructed to provide commentary on the story or to continue the theme of the story. The long poems are usually composed in the recitative style.

A girl and her three brothers (Amoako Ata, Gyembibi and Afrane) went on a long visit to some place where the brothers engaged in trade and made a lot of money. As they were returning these three brothers died one after the other in the course of the journey leaving her to return to their mother alone. When she reached the outskirts of the town, so the story goes, she announced her fate in the song below, which she repeated several times until she got home. This drew a crowd of mourners to her house.

If mother Anka Opommaa were alive,
I should have eaten by now, princess.
Whom shall I send to inform Amoako Ata
Gyembibi and Afrane that
Mother's gun has been left behind
And that I have had a terrible time?
Hunter? Yes! Dark forest? Yes.
What is that rustling under the thicket?
Little child, stop crying, stop wailing,
Gyan Koranten Asiemmire,
Parrot,
Walk in front of me that I may follow on.
What manner of marriage is this?

Elephant and Antelope are said to have made very good friends in the forest. Elephant being the stronger and the wealthier of the two was able to lay on sumptious meals everyday to which he invited Antelope. One day he expressed the desire to visit Antelope in his house. This embarrassed Antelope, for he also wanted to give him a good meal. It occurred to him after failing to get any meat that Mother Antelope was the answer, so he caused her to be killed and used. When Elephant arrived he was greatly surprised by the delicious meal and asked to see Mother Antelope. But Antelope succeeded in putting this off. After the meal however, Elephant again asked for Mother Antelope and Antelope replied in a song as follows:

Elephant, please don't worry me.
Have you ever seen a poor man
And a wealthy man exchange things equally?
Elephant Akwaa Brenkoto that commands his destiny,
Elephant that plucks the tops of trees on his right,
King of musketry, father and king,
Birefi Akuampon, mighty one to whom all stray goods
are sent to be used,
Yes; let us proceed.
Mother Antelope, I have stewed her.
Yes, let us proceed.
Mother Antelope, I have used her to redeem myself.
Yes, let us proceed.

MAIDEN SONGS. In Akan society maiden songs are sung on moonlight nights by women who form themselves into little performing groups for this purpose. The women in a group stand in a circle and clap their hands as they sing. Each one takes a turn at leading the verses of each song.

The songs are used mainly for praising or making references to loved ones, brothers or other kinsmen or outstanding men in the community. In the past anybody who was thus honoured was supposed to give the women presents the following day.

He is coming, he is coming,
Treading along on camel blanket in triumph.
Yes, stranger, we are bestirring ourselves.
Agyei the warrior is drunk,
The green mamba with fearful eyes.
    Yes, Agyei the warrior,
    He is treading along on camel blanket in triumph,
    Make way for him.
He is coming, he is coming.
Treading along on sandals (i.e. on men)
Yes, stranger, we are bestirring ourselves.
Adum Agyei is drunk.
The Green Mamba, Afaafa Adu.
    Yes, Agyei the warrior,
    He is treading along on camel blanket in triumph,
    Make way for him.

Would the nobleman please leave me a farm.
Kinsman of Esum Atakora of Mampon,
Would he please, leave me a farm.
Alas if he left me a farm, I could not make it.
I am ill; I shall die; I shall not do the work.
    Yes, Nsia Yaw,
    Nsia Yaw, Nsia Yaw.
    Yes, Nsia Yaw, a farm as an heirloom.
Let the Valiant leave me a farm.
Borofo Asamoa the nobleman,
Father, please leave me a farm.
Alas, if he left me a farm, I could not make it.
I am ill; I shall die; I shall not do the work.
    Yes, Nsia Yaw,
    Nsia Yaw, Nsia Yaw.
    Yes, Nsia Yaw, a farm as an heirloom.
Let the Nobleman leave me a farm.
Obonsafo Anin Agyei,
Please leave me a farm.
Alas, if he left me a farm, I could not make it.
Like the chameleon, I do not work.
    Yes, Nsia Yaw,
    Nsia Yaw, Nsia Yaw.
    Yes, Nsia Yaw, a farm as an heirloom.

I delivered my child in toil and tribulation,
Yes, mother Pokuwaa.
Komfanko, child of wealth,
I would have performed your puberty rites,
Were it not because of Death.
Death! Death! Death!

This death should not bother me indeed!
Love has died and left her child behind.
I should not worry: God has allowed it.

WARRIOR SONGS. Warrior organisations form part of the political organisation of Akan states. These organisations have their own songs which they use on important occasions such as festivals, political ceremonies, and in the past in times of war. The songs include songs of defiance, incitement, insult, songs of mourning (used when conveying the body of a dead captain back home) etc.

Osee, man of Apente.
Osee, man of Apente.
We shall fight battles for our nation.
There was a battle brewing, Osee,
But the army of the enemy never arrived.
We did not feel their presence.
You are children of ghosts, and nocturnal fighters.
Night fighters,
You have laid them low.
Osee has laid you low.
The night fighter has laid you low.

Hirelings adamant to rain and scorching sun,
Members of the Apagya company,
There was a canon mounted vainly on top of the fort,*
The canon could not break us,
The trusted company that engages in battle,
Hail the helper.

* British Fort on the coast of Ghana. The reference is to British Ashanti wars.

THE POETRY OF HORNS AND DRUMS. The development of the poetic tradition has not been confined to the spoken voice. A great deal of our heroic poetry is conveyed through the medium of horns, pipes and drums whose rhythms often have a verbal basis.

The poetry of horns and pipes tends to be in the lyric style, as you will see from the following examples:

Duodu, the King's servant,
Duodu killed in his valour,
See! The rain washes his parlour away.
Duodu, I am grieved by your death.
Alas! It is an ancient truth.
Once dead, you are gone and useless.

Conqueror of Kings,
The great silk cotton tree has fallen down.
In its place has sprung the small osesea tree.
There is a big river flowing in the valley,
But it has no deposits of alluvial gold.
Asono Gyima that never retracts his words,
Noble and tall Osafo Gyamfi Agyei,
Osafo, father of Osee of Amanten,
Master of the path, I am exposed to fire.
Master of the path, I am exposed to fire.

The word of the evil one lasts only for a day.
Asante Kotoko, do you say I have no wisdom?
Korobea Yirefi Anwoma Sante Kotoko,
Do you say I have no wisdom?
Kotoko, are you not troublesome?
You are very troublesome!
Do you say that I have no wisdom?
Hence! Take it away! Be gone!
Take it away!
Asante Kotoko, do you say I have no wisdom?
Kotoko, you are very very troublesome!

Finally the poetry of drums may be noted. Although drums are used in Akan society for making a limited number of announcements, they are also vehicles of literature. Indeed there would be no hope for the talking drum if its only function was to give information in view of the radio, the newspaper and other modern means of communication. On state occasions they drum poems of special interest to the chief and the community as a whole. These poems run into many scores of verses and fall into four groups:

First there are the poems of the drum prelude called the Awakening '*Anyaneanyane*'. When a drummer is playing these poems as he has to on the approach of the Adae festival, he begins by announcing himself, closing the opening with the formula:

I am learning, let me succeed,
or I am addressing you, and you will understand.

He then addresses in turn the components of the drum—the wood of the drum, the drum pegs, strings, the animal that provides the hide of the drum: the elephant or the duyker.

Next he addresses the Earth, God, the witch, the cock and the clock bird, ancestor drummers, and finally the god Tano, saying:

The path has crossed the river.
The river has crossed the path.
Which is the elder?
We made the path and found the river.
The river is from long ago,
The river is from the Creator of the universe.
Kokon Tano,
Birefia Tano,
River-god of the King of Ashanti,
Noble river, noble and gracious one,
When we are about to go to war,
We break the news to you.
Slowly and patiently I get on my feet.
Slowly and patiently I get on my feet.
Ta Kofi, noble one,
Firampon condolences!
condolences!
condolences!
Ta Kofi, noble one,
The drummer of the Talking Drum says
He is kneeling before you.
He prays you, he is about to drum on the Talking Drum.
When he drums, let his drumming be smooth and steady.
Do not let him falter.
I am learning let me succeed.

The cook and the clock-bird are frequently referred to in drum texts because of the alert they give. They are like drummers who have to keep vigil while others are asleep.

When I was going to bed, I was not sleepy.
When I felt like sleeping, my eyes never closed.
All night he stood in his coop,
While children lay in bed asleep.
Early in the morning he was hailed:
"Good morning to you, Mr. Cock"
The Cock crows in the morning.
The Cock rises to crow before the crack of dawn.
I am learning, let me succeed.
Kokokyinaka Asamoa, the Clock-bird,
How do we greet you?
We greet you with "Anyaado",
We hail you as the Drummer's child,
The Drummer's child sleeps and awakes with the dawn,
I am learning, let me succeed.

The next example from the drum prelude "The Awakening" is about the deity traditionally revered above all others:

Otweaduampon Nyame, the Ancient God.
The Heavens are wide, exceedingly wide.
The Earth is wide, very very wide.
We have lifted it and taken it away.

We have lifted it and brought it back.
From time immemorial.
The God of old bids us all
Abide by his injunctions.
Then shall we get whatever we want,
Be it white or red.
It is God, The Creator, the Gracious one.
Good morning to you, God. Good morning.
I am learning, let me succeed.

The second group of texts are in the nature of panegyrics or eulogies Abridged forms incorporating the names, praise appellations of individuals and greetings or messages are used in social situations—for example in a dance arena. The chief use of these eulogies, however, is for honouring kings and ancestor kings on ceremonial occasions when their origin, parentage, and noble deeds are recalled against a background of tribal history, as in the following example recorded at Kokofu in Ashanti:

Slowly and patiently I get on my feet.
Slowly and patiently I get on my feet.
Osee Asibe, noble ruler,
Firampon, condolences, condolences, condolences!
Osee Asibe throws away,[1] throws away, throws away,
Throws away to the remotest corner,
Osee Asibe,
Child of Adu Gyamfi Twere.
Tweneboa Adu Ampafrako,
Child of the Ancient God,
Dress up and let us go.[2]
Dress up and let us go.
Child of Noble Adwoa Seewa,
Ruler of Kokofu Adu Ampoforo Antwi,
Child of the Ancient God,
Lifter of towns,[3] noble ruler and last born,
Osee Asibe,
Osee Asibe, the noble ruler says
He hails from Kotoko: He is truly Kotoko.
Korobea Yirefi Anwoma Sante Kotoko
When we are about to mention your name,
We give you a gun and a sword.
You are the valiant man that fights with gun and sword.
If you were to decide, you would decide for war,
You hail from Kotoko, you are truly Kotoko.
Osee Asibe, you are a man,
You are a brave man.
You have always been a man of valour.
The watery shrub that thrives on thorny ground,
You are the large odadee tree,
The tree with buttress that stands at Donkoronkwanta,
A man feared by men.

(1) presents, gifts of money
(2) refers to the leadership of the Chief or King in Akan society.
(3) attribute of chief as war leader.

Osee Asibe,
You hail from Kokofu and later you belonged to Kokofu.
Also you hail from Kumase 'Adu Ampoforo Antwi'.
Your ancestry is from Akyeremade Nitibanso,
Where drinking water is obtained from Suben.
Osee the last born,
Later your home has been Kokofu.
The coiling branch that coils round trees,
The *ofuntum* wood that breaks the axe,
Osee Asibe, you are in part the wood of *odum*,
In part the wood of *odan*, in part the wood of the silk cotton,
In part the wood of *ofetefre*, in part *akakapempen*.
The hunter that provides for all,
That gives the vulture its carrion,
The vulture says it thanks you:
Give it its carrion.
It thanks you, mighty one.
It thanks you, gracious one.
Firampon, condolences, condolences, condolences!

The third group of poems are those used for heralding the movements of a chief, for greeting people, for announcing emergencies and so on. For example when a chief is drinking at a state ceremony, the drummer drums a running commentary. If it is gin, he drums as follows:

Chief they are bringing it.
They are bringing it.
They are bringing it to you.
Chief you are about to drink imported liquor.
Chief pour some on the ground.
He is sipping it slowly and gradually.
He is sipping it in little draughts.

if the drink is palmwine, he drums the following alternative:

Chief they are bringing you cool and refreshing drink.
They are bringing you palmwine.
He has got it. He is drinking it.
He has got it. He is drinking it.
He is sipping it in little draughts.
He is sipping it slowly and gradually.....
The residue remains. It is poured out.
Well done, Gracious one, Well done!

The last group of poems are the proverbs. These may be played separately or they may be incorporated into other poems, or they may be incorporated into drum pieces intended for dancing. Dances like *Akantam, samrawa orosee* make use of these proverbs. Here for example are three proverbs of the Akantam dance.

Rustling noise by the wayside
Means what creature?
The wood-pigeon, the wood-pigeon.
Wood-pigeon Seniampon,
He goes along the path eating grains of millet.
Condolences, wood-pigeon.

Duyker Adawurampon Kwamena
Who told the Duyker to get hold of his sword?
The tail of the Duyker is short,
But he is able to brush himself with it.
"I am bearing fruit", says Pot Herb.
"I am bearing fruit," says Garden Egg.
Logs of firewood are lying on the farm,
But it is the faggot that makes the fire flare.
Duyker Adawurampon Kwamena
Who told the Duyker to get hold of his sword?
The tail of the Duyker is short,
But he is able to brush himself with it.
"Pluck the feathers off this tortoise".
Tortoise: "Fowl, do you hear that?"
Duyker Adawurampon Kwamena,
Who told the Duyker to get hold of his sword?
The tail of the Duyker is short,
But he is able to brush himself with it.

CONCLUSION

The texts quoted in this paper are but a very small fraction of the main items of literary interest that have been preserved by the four traditions mentioned. Many of the texts cannot be fully understood except by reference to our culture—our way of life, our accumulated experience of nature and society, our system of values. Moreover it is important to keep in mind the actual contexts of situation in which particular texts are used, because style, form, subject matter and meaning are also governed by these, for it is such contexts that call for the use of appropriate verbal pieces providing entertainment, reflections or commentaries on situations or pieces that may incite men to action or to a definite line of action, pieces that may be used for condoling, abusing, praising. As society expects these expressions in social situations, there are not only traditional pieces which individuals may use as required of them but also social conventions of behaviour, as well as conventions in form and language to be observed.

Oral literature has tended to give prominence to persons, interpersonal relationships and attitudes and values derived from our conception of the universe. We do not spend time on the daffodils or the nightingale or on reflections on abstract beauty, the night sky and so on as things in themselves but only in relation to social experience. Our poetry is full of animals and plants, but these are used because they provide apt metaphors or simile, or compressed ways of stating bits of social experience.

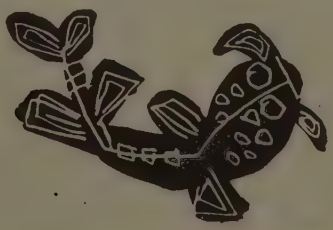
In group life, the use of poetry is more or less organised. There are men set aside in the state to convey the expressions of literature of poems on drums. There are others set aside to convey them through horns and pipes, and others set aside to convey them by word of mouth. Similarly among popular bands and associations there are leading singers, who are able to bring into the song a variety of poetic expressions appropriate for the occasion.

The origin and store-house of Akan poetry, therefore, is the individual member of Akan society brought up on the traditions of his people, the individual who from childhood has been taught or has learned through social experience to use certain words and expressions, to regard some as beautiful, deep, proper, improper, correct, bad, and so on; the individual who has been taught to understand and use the proverbs in his language, who has been taught to sing cradle songs, dance songs, war songs and love songs, to drum and dance or to appreciate drumming and dancing; the individual who under emotional stress would quote a proverb, a familiar saying, a line or two of traditional oral poetry, just as some English people and Africans with English education would quote Shakespeare, Milton, Gray and others. Our poetry, therefore, is held corporately by many such individuals in our society. That has been the tradition.

Hence the process of transmission through education and social experience is as important in this respect as it has always been for other aspects of our culture. In the past our oral traditions formed part of the educational programme for the child who grew up in the knowledge of the maxims and sayings of his society and learnt to compose and recite the texts of libations, verse and stories in appropriate contexts. In the past, the knowledge of the individual represented a cultural tradition of many generations. There was continuity, and it is in that sense that we speak of our having a poetic tradition — a tradition that guided the individual, a tradition which demanded from the individual degrees of accuracy in the reproduction of texts.

But the function of the individual was not merely to act as a carrier of a tradition. He was also to maintain it by using it, by recreating it, for each time he performed his set pieces, he was in a sense giving the poetry of his people a new life. It was also his function, though not an obligation to add new forms and new material if he could.

The poetic tradition is still being maintained, though not to the same degree. Some types of poetry, particularly those associated with the Court are not nearly as well known as they used to be only a few decades ago. Many people, particularly those who have had the benefit of school education cannot make any bold claim to a knowledge of the traditions. Nevertheless poets and custodians of the tradition are still to be found creating and recreating traditional poetry in appropriate contexts.



THE BOCHIO

A LITTLE KNOWN TYPE OF AFRICAN CARVING

BY ULLI BEIER

Writers on African art have up to date paid very little attention to the so-called "Bochio", a form of wood carving found in the former Kingdom of Dahomey. It seems that the royal art of Dahomey has absorbed most of the interest, while this popular form of wood carving has hardly been noticed.

Most widely known are the famous bas-reliefs in the royal palaces of Abomey. While they are not of outstanding artistic merit they are full of historical interest as they depict the battles and victories of the two powerful kings: Gezo and Glele, who in the nineteenth century raised the power of Abomey to unforeseen heights. The Dahomean kingdom was a comparatively recent creation, it dates back to the early 17th century. But during the early years of the kingdom, the Dahomeans were greatly harrassed and subdued by the mighty kingdom of the Yoruba of Oyo, who came raiding the countryside every year and went away with their tribute. It was left to Gezo and Glele to liberate the country from its neighbours and to carry many destructive and vindictive wars into Yoruba territories. The bas-reliefs on the palaces of these two kings refer to individual battles, celebrating the victories and often even depicting the defeat of individual famous warriors, like Ajanaku.

These bas-reliefs are well documented. Since Waterlot's book: "Les Bas Reliefs des Batiments Royeaux d'Abomey" other scholars like Lombard and Verger have also commented on the famous reliefs.

The literature on the woodcarvings is comparatively poor. Glimpsing through books on African art one is not likely to find a Bochio. Those carvings labelled "Dahomey" in art books or in European museums are in fact nearly always Yoruba carvings, that came from neighbouring Yoruba towns and that were usually picked up by collectors in Porto Novo.

The Bochio has been mentioned only by two anthropologists, Herskovits and Mercier. This is surprising, because walking through the capital of the kingdom one literally stumbles over Bochio wherever one goes. Nearly all of them are placed in the open, in front of houses and compounds, and even now there are

many hundreds to be seen and still in active use. Looked at superficially, they are certainly much less attractive than the royal art of Abomey. Unassumingly they stand in the ground, blackened with blood and palm oil, often to the extent that their features are undistinguishable. They all look rather alike, and unlike the bas-reliefs they have no story to tell, they relate to no historical events.

The Bochio is a kind of personal guardian spirit of the man who installs the carving. The literal meaning of the word has been variously given as: 'the medicine that rests on the spirit' (*bo*—gris-gris, magical medicine; *chi*—to rest on; *ye* — spirit) or: 'the medicine of a dead body' (*bo* — gris-gris, magical medicine; *chio* — a dead body.)

The Bochio is installed on the advice of the oracle priest, and it serves as a site of worship for the guardian spirit. The spirit (yehoue) thus worshipped is not in the same class as a vodoun or deity. That is, there is no mythology attached to it, no complex ritual, no liturgy, no priesthood. The head of the compound usually installs a Bochio for the benefit of all the inhabitants of the compound. The actual ceremony of consecration will be carried out by the Fa (oracle) priest. A chicken is usually sacrificed and the blood and red palm oil are poured on the figure. The Bochio serves principally to keep evil out of the house. Sometimes it is carved with a Janus head, and it is then said that any mischief that has escaped the one face will certainly be diverted by the other. Once the Bochio is installed, every member of the family can sacrifice to it whenever he feels there is special need for protection. For example, women frequently pour oil over it and offer a prayer before going to market. Individual members of the family may also be instructed by the oracle to install their own Bochio and usually one finds quite a number of them near the entrance of the compound. Most Bochio are outside, but some fulfilling special protective functions are found on the doorstep or even inside the house.

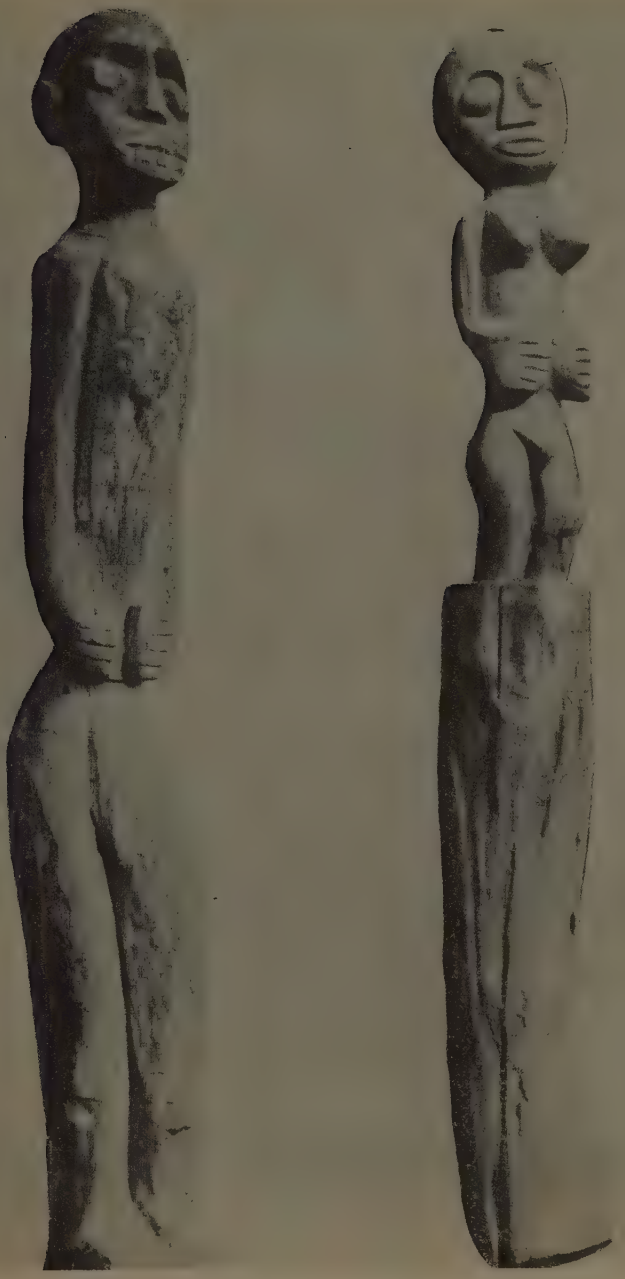
The spirit receiving the reverence remains unnamed. It is just the protector, the averter of misfortune. Because of this vagueness perhaps, the Bochio is mostly attached to the shrine of a vodoun or deity and most frequently is found on the shrine of Legba, the great god of fate. Legba is usually symbolised by a small laterite mound into which is stuck a phallic symbol. Usually one or more Bochio are found with it, the whole being covered by a small grass roof. Legba is the trickster God of the Fon, a mischievous deity held responsible for all misfortune. His shrine is therefore always kept outside the house, and if properly worshipped he will act as a kind of buffer between the inhabitants of the compound and ill intentioned strangers. By sacrifices and prayer one can, as it were, divert the dangerous side of Legba towards one's enemies. Legba therefore serves as a protector of the compound, in spite of his dangerous, destructive qualities. The Bochio are placed with him in order to help him and work with him. When the figures are female they are spoken of as Legba's wives. Bochio thus placed are usually not addressed directly. The prayer is addressed to Legba and Legba is really given the sacrifice, but the Bochio receives "his share" out of everything given to Legba.

When the owner of the Legba dies the shrine is destroyed by a Fa priest and the figures taken away by him. The priest may wash the figures with appropriate sacrifices and he is then entitled to sell them and they may be re-installed elsewhere with the appropriate consecration rites.

The custom of erecting Bochio is generally said to date back to the time when the Fa oracle was introduced to Abomey. According to tradition the Fa came to Abomey during the reign of Agaja (1708-1732) and it was taught by a travelling Yoruba priest called Sepete. Although there seems little doubt that the Fa oracle of the Fon is derived from the Yoruba Ifa, yet it must be noted that Bochio are unknown in Yoruba country. The Fa oracle, however, plays such an essential part in the erection of the Bochio today, that it is indeed difficult to imagine them separate from it. However, the origin of the belief and the custom are shrouded in mystery.

Bochio are carved by professional carvers, but no carver is professional to the extent of living only on his craft. All carvers also have farms. Mostly the art is kept within certain families and is passed on from father to son. Women do not carve, which seems to be true of nearly all West African societies. The tools used in carving are the chisel, the adze and the knife, usually employed in that order. Sometimes leaves are employed for polishing. The reddish wood does not long retain its original colour but is soon darkened with blood and oil. At present, at least, the carvings are never painted.

Herskovits in his well known book "Dahomey", surprisingly says: "The art must be regarded as a realistic one." The Fon carver stylizes his figures to the extreme, transposing all organic shapes into near geometrical ones: the head of the figure is a slightly elongated sphere, the eyes are round balls, the eyebrows semicircular arches. The nose is a triangle. The figure is hewn in large shapes out of the wood, often the original bend or twist of the stem has been attractively preserved in the carving. The carver shows no interest in naturalistic detail. He does not show any hair, eyelids, facial marks, cheek bones. The hands are simplified to rectangular shape with four parallel incisions to mark the fingers. The feet are sometimes left out altogether, the body growing, as it were, from the stem that is stuck into the earth. The Bochio are extremely stylized and conventionalized, they can be distinguished from any other type of African carving at a glance, by their rough oversimplified forms and their characteristic posture with closed fists pressed against the hips. It is interesting to compare the Bochio of Abomey with another very stylised form of carving: the Yoruba twin figures, (Ibeji). The Yoruba carver is far closer to organic forms than the Fon carver and goes into much greater detail in his representation: the head though highly stylized, has yet got a great deal of closely observed detail like eyelashes, nostrils, tribal marks, hairstyle which are all missing in the Fon carving. The surface of the Yoruba carving is treated with much delicacy. The smooth bulging forms vaguely suggest anatomical features of the body. This is a carving which is obviously meant to be looked at closely, to be handled lovingly. In the Bochio on the other hand the surface treatment is



Above: A Bochio placed on a shrine of Gun.
Opposite page: A Yoruba Ibeji (top right) contrasted with a Bochio (top left).
Below: A mud relief from the royal palace in Abomey.

rough, all detail dispensed with and the forms created by deep bold incisions in the wood. The Bochio is meant to be seen in the outside, from a distance in the glaring whitish sunlight of Africa; the Ibeji is meant to be looked at in the soft twilight of a Yoruba shrine.

The Bochio have not got the subtleness and sophistication of Yoruba woodcarving, nor do they attain the same standard of craftsmanship. But in their very simplicity they can be most touching. With their large, bulging, unworldly eyes, their tense mouth and slightly tilted heads they sometimes achieve an expression of religious intensity that can bear comparison with the best in West African art.

The Bochio are still being carved in great numbers, but the art shows signs of decline. Carvers begin to produce carvings for sale to Europeans. The spiritual concepts that have produced the art have been weakened during the last decades. It is interesting to read in Herskvits' book that when he visited Dahomey in 1938 it was extremely difficult to acquire a Bochio. It was then necessary to "exchange" the carving, that is to say one had to have a new one made which was consecrated with the appropriate ceremonies to replace the old one. Now, twenty years later the casual visitor will be offered Bochio by the dozen!

Yet the art is still alive and so is the religious belief behind it. Abomey is still full of Bochio and they are, in fact, the real charm of the town. Wherever one walks among the spacious, thatched compounds of the ancient capital one comes across these withered woodcarvings standing under their little thatched roofs or in the blazing sun. Artistically they are the most interesting feature of the town. The bas-reliefs with all their gay colour and fascinating subject matter are clumsy in form and rather too naive in character. The same could be said of the appliqué cloths in the throne rooms. The elegant brass work on the other hand are flashy and "crafty". The royal art of Abomey in fact is somewhat superficial. This is perhaps not so surprising. The only emotion that produced it was the need to praise and glorify the warrior kings. The Bochio on the other hand are inspired by deep religious emotions and needs, and this is reflected in their simple sincerity.

POETRY IN RUMBA RHYTHMS

BY JANHEINZ JAHN.

The Caribean Isles, that stretch in a vast semicircle of nearly 2,000 miles from the Mexican peninsula Yucatan, to the delta of the Orinoco, and that separate the Caribbean Sea from the Atlantic Ocean, have been the scene of manifold encounters, ever since they were discovered by Columbus. The first explorers met here the aboriginees whom they mistakenly called Indians. A century later, around 1600, the original inhabitants of the isles had been extinguished, annihilated. The French, British, Spanish and Dutch fought for possession of the isles and the original gold hunters had by then been replaced by the planters, who grew their sugar and cotton with the help of mass-imported African slaves. Around the palacial planters' mansions one heard the whistles of the slave drivers, the hissing of the whip, the clinking of the chains, the barking of the dogs. The slaves adopted the languages of their masters, but as they were far more numerous than the Europeans they were able to retain certain elements of African culture. In 1804 a revolution brought freedom to Haiti, and gradually slavery was abolished on the other islands: in 1833 in Jamaica, Barbados and Trinidad, in 1848 in Martinique and Guadeloupe and in 1880 in Cuba. Thus the preconditions had been created from which the new hybrid cultures of the twentieth century could grow. The various European traditions—French, British and Spanish — and diverse African ones — Yoruba, Dahomean, Ashanti—blended to form a colourful new folklore, which formed the basis for a new poetry, literature and art.

In the twenties a number of Cuban authors discovered folk-lore as a theme. In 1928 Alejo Carpentier, a Cuban poet of French-Russian descent compiled "La Rebambaramba", a colonial-Cuban ballet. In the same year appeared Ramón Guiraos poem "Bailadora de Rumba" (the rumba dancer) and Jose Tallet's "Rumba". Here the rhythm of the rumba was for the first time made the basis of poetic expression.

Zumba, mamá, la rumba y tambó!
Mabimba, mabomba, mabomba y bombó!
Buzzing, mamá, the rumba with its drum!
Mabimba, mabomba, mabimba, kong-kong.
She dances the rumba, the blackish Tomasa
He dances the rumba, José Encarnación!

She's rolling her right hip, she's rolling her left hip,
He turns and he squats and he jerks his behind,
He pushes his belly, he bows and he marches
On one of his heels, and one drags behind.
Chaqui, chaqui, chaqui, chaqui,
Chaqui, chaqui, chaqui, chaqui,

The rhythm gives the poems a continuous tension, it makes the reader actually see and experience the dance, even without the aid of instrumentation. The poet attempts a precise onomatopaeic representation of the instruments, of the different sound values of the drums. Soon the theme is widened to embrace folkloristic scenes; exclamations and dialectal expressions are being used to help in the building up of the sound picture.

The first anthology of Afro-Cuban poetry by Ramón Guiro was not only a collection of available material, it was also meant to stimulate poets to develop popular traditions into new art forms. Just as Robert Burns derived his art from Scottish folklore, so Nicolas Guillén, Emilio Ballagas, and Marcellino Arozarena have given international significance to Afro-Cuban folklore. Sensuality and humour, musicality and rhythm of the Afro-Cuban are merged in their verses with the traditional forms of Spanish poetry.

Afro-Cuban poetry is a "black" poetry and forms part of the "Black Renaissance", not because all of its authors are black skinned, but because the most important elements of its style are derived from Africa. Types of literature are differentiated by style, not by colour of skin. There is no such thing as racial literature, as Afro-Cuban poetry proves. Its authors are black and white and mulattos of all shades; but style, rhythm and themes are African. They came to Cuba with the African slaves, who preserved their Religious concepts through and beyond the period of slavery. Although the Africans in Cuba came perforce from the most diverse parts of Africa, it is the culture of the Yoruba that has finally survived, and whose rites and "orisha" have eventually merged with Catholicism and its Saints. Changó (Yoruba: Shango) the god of lightening, war, and of drums has been merged with St. Barbara. Obatalá (Yoruba: Obatala) a bisexual god, was merged with Virgen de las Mercedes, the merciful virgin. This deity, which is known by its preference for white beads, is also called Merse, which is an abbreviation of Virgen de las Mercedes. Ogun, the Yoruba god of war is identified with St. Peter. To Babalú or Babalú Ayé (the Yoruba Shapana) mules and dogs are sacred. He protects his worshippers from diseases and is identified with St. Lazarus. Even Changó does not perform as many miracles as he. But Religious and profane life are closely interwoven. The religious feasts, whose dances aim at the state when the God "mounts the head" of the dancer, may merge into popular amusements and vice versa.

The original association with different deities dominates the character and diversity of profane dances and rhythms. The poets represent these rhythms by onomatopaeic soundgroups, that are varied and repeated like a "Leitmotiv". This forms the basic rhythm, that is frequently broken by a counter rhythm. These verses should be read aloud, so that the ear can feel the rhythmic transi-

tions, movements and countermovements, introduction and build up, and the harmony of Spanish tradition with African rhythm. The Spanish language, has been able to incorporate unbroken African rhythms and has been able to make harmonic use of African vocabulary, because unlike French, Spanish allows a sharp accentuation, unlike German it is rich in short sonorous vowels, and unlike English it has preserved the purity of vowels. That is perhaps the reason why there is no parallel to Afro-Cuban poetry in the French speaking Haiti, although the religious concepts of its people are formed by traditions imported from the African kingdom of Dahomey. Haiti too has its sacred Vodun songs with African rhythms, but they are sung in Creole, a dialect strongly influenced by African languages and so different from French that its rhythms cannot be transposed into French poetry.

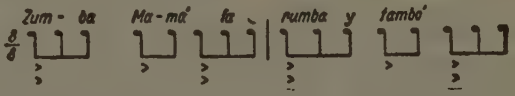
The English language is more suitable for translations, because it can carry strong accents like Spanish, and it is possible to recite even the translations to a drum. The rhythm is achieved as follows: the stressed syllables are strongly accentuated and the unstressed syllables between them—one, two or three in number—are so arranged that every second stress falls on the musical syncope. Thus in the verse "Zumba, mamá, la rumba y tambó" there are two, then one finally three unstressed syllables between the accents:

X́ XX̀ X́ X X́ XXX X́

If one tries to read this verse in Iambic or Trochaic metre one arrives at a line of five feet and the rhythm is destroyed.

X̀X/XX́/XX̀/XX́/XX́ or X̀XX/X̀X/X̀X/X̀X/X

In scanning this verse therefore one has to count the pauses as well, in such a way that the syllables ma and bo will be syncopated. The words mama and tambó should be followed, as it were, by an extra drum beat. This rhythm continues throughout the entire poem.



The power of Afro-Cuban rhythm has spread far beyond the island and its influence is felt in the whole of Latin America, its popularity is unique. Some poets were stimulated to write verses in other dance rhythms. Virginia Brindis de Salas writes verse in Tango rhythm :

TANGO No. 2
O what rings
under the eyes
has the night
in the hips of the tangos.

The piano
sighs and the drum
now sings in Bandonion.
A dance
as the slaves have danced it:
pace and rhythm are
in the tail of the cock.

Yimbámba — yimbámba
Yimbámba — Yimbambiá
thus sound your supple hips
and thus your feet as well.
Ahéeé sings the small one
Ahóoó the piano sings.
Yumba and yumba,
yumba and yumba,
yumba and yumba,
yumba and yumba,
tchass-tchass!
O what rings
under the eyes
has the night
who is now straining her hips
in our sleepy slow Tango.

Léon Damas of Guiana has even written an amusing poem in a valse rhythm.

Afro-Cuban rythms are irresistable. In his poem "Casino", Paul Niger tries to show how an intellectual civil servant who disapproves of the popular art of his people because it is not "respectable", is finally overpowered by the rhythm, inspite of his resistance. (See page 46).

The great Spanish poet Federico García Lorca too could not escape the charm. When he visited Havanna in 1930 he composed a Són, that begins as follows:

As soon as the full moon has risen
I drive to Santiago de Cuba
I drive to Santiago
in a cart of darkening waters.
I drive to Santiago.
There sing the roofs of the palm trees
I drive to Santiago.

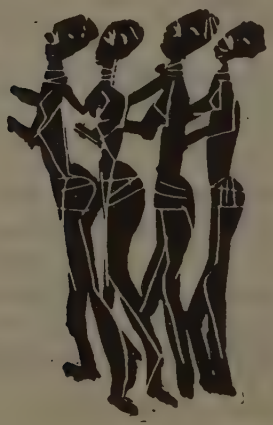
The popularity of Afro-Cuban poetry in the New World has led tourists (who do not know Spanish) to believe that it is merely a kind of exotic, native entertainment. The poet Arozarena protests bitterly:

We are the folkloristic
eternally drunk
drunk of the whip and the forest and song
in the bars of rhythms
the rumba beats rum into our bodies
and tropics.
The fool of the sounding isles
(musical puddles on the meadows of the Atlantic)
wraps us in cases of Sextets and songs
in order to comb the tourist's dishevelled curiosity.

For eyelashes reflecting respectable pictures
the cornea, unable to seize truth by its root
our hunger is song,
our culture song,
our laughter song, our weeping song, song,
song in Negroes like semiquavers
song in Negroes like suffering oxen
that drag on their suffering life before musical carts.

A poetry that is popular, a poetry that combines surprisingly modern rhythm with gay laughter is easily thought of as insincere. Yet one should not judge too quickly! Poetry means also: to make music with language. Here a new colour is added to the rainbow (as a Carribbean poet put it) a new rhythm penetrates the world, and the demand of the African poet Senghor is fulfilled: "I insist that a poem is only perfect, when it becomes song: word and music combined. It is time to arrest the degeneration of the modern world, above all of poetry. Poetry must rediscover its beginnings, the times when it was being sung and danced. As in Greece, in Israel and above all in the Egypt of the Pharaohs. And as it still happens today in black Africa."

Afro-Cuban poetry has taught a European language how to dance. It unites Black and White, tradition and modernity, and gives artistic expression to the Cuban soul.



AFRO-CUBAN POEMS

BALLAD OF THE TWO ANCESTORS

BY NICOLAS GUILLEN.

Shadows, only visible to me.
My two ancestors haunt me.

Spear with bony point,
Drum of leather and wood:
My black ancestor.
Ruff round the broad neck,
Armour grey and proud:
My white ancestor.
Barefoot and chiselled body,
That is the black one;
Pupils like arctic glass
Has the white one.

Africa of moist forests
And of drums round and deep-toned
— I shall die of it!
(says my black ancestor.)
Water full of crocodiles,
Coconuts even at dawn —
— I'm bored with it!
(says my white ancestor.)
O sails in the bitter wind
And the gold blinking galleys.....
— I shall die of it!
(says my black ancestor.)
O coasts of maiden's necks
Betrayed by coloured beads.....
I'm bored with it!
(says my white ancestor.)

O purely worked sun
Set in the ring of the tropics,
Shining on monkeys' dreams.....
How many ships! How many ships!
How many negroes! How many negroes!
The sugar cane glistens from far
And the whip of the slave dealer!
Blood? Blood. Tears? Tears.
Veins and eyes half opened
And empty mornings
And afternoons in the sugar distillery
And a large voice, a strong voice,
Tears the silence.
How many ships, How many ships!
How many negroes!
Shadows, only visible to me,
My two ancestors haunt me.
Don Federico cries to me
And Papa Fecundo is silent.
The two dream in the night
They stride on and on
But I reconcile them.
"Federico"!
"Fecundo!"—and so they embrace,
They sigh together and lift
Their heavy heads.
After all, they are both of the same size
Under the high stars.
After all they are both of the same size,
The black greediness and the white greediness,
The black suffering and the white suffering,
After all they are both of the same size,
The white fear and the black fear,
After all they are both of the same size,
They cry, dream, weep, sing,
Sing, sing, sing.....

translated by
Akanji.

SENSEMAYA
(Song to kill a snake)
BY NICOLAS GUILLEN

Mayombé-bombe-mayombé !
Mayombé-bombe-mayombé !
Mayombé-bombe-mayombé !

The snake has eyes of glass.
The snake appears and it winds round the post
With eyes of glass round the post,
With her eyes of glass.
The snake creeps without feet.
The snake hides in the grass,
Hides creeping in grass,
Creeps without feet.

Mayombé-bombe-mayombé !
Mayombé-bombe-mayombé !
Mayombé-bombe-mayombé !

Give her the axe and she dies:
Give it her now!
Don't give her the foot, for she bites,
Don't give her the foot for she runs.

Sensemayá, the snake,
Sensemayá.
Sensemayá with the eyes,
Sensemayá.

Sensemayá with the tongue,
Sensemayá.
Sensemayá with the mouth,
Sensemayá.
The dead snake does not eat,
The dead snake does not hiss,
Does not creep,
Does not run,
The dead snake does not drink,
The dead snake does not look,
Does not breathe,
Does not bite.

Mayombé-bombe-mayombé !
Sensemayá, the snake.....
Mayombé-bombe-mayombé !
Sensemayá does not move.....
Mayombé-bombe-mayombé !
Sensemayá the snake.....
Mayombé-bombe-mayombé !
Sensemayá is dead.....

translated by
Akanji.

WE REHEARSE THE SNAKE DANCE
BY MARCELINO AROZARENA

Encarnasión!
Get out the box make it rattle and shake,
get out this murumba which snaps at your feet,
get it out,
get it out,
show us the dance of the snake!
Sharpen your beak:
"Alaalá-a-lá,
alaalá-a-laaa....."
Sing without break:
"Alaalá-a-lá,
alaalá-a-laaa,
get out your head
here is the snake
the snake Mayá
alaalá-a-laaa
we dance, we dance the dance of Mayá.....'
Ha!
Step out with your foot
but dance very slow
as if you were stiff
as if you would fear the Mayá
and her teeth, alaalá.....
Don't move your hips
don't move your hips
in the hips sings the fever of my love.
Encarnasión!
I walk behind your body in the harmony of the dance,
when the others look on
they see us as one
when they look from the side
they see us as two
and the song resounds anew:
"Alaalá-a-lá,
alaalá-a-laaa,
get out your head
the snake is here
the snake Mayá
alaalá-a-laaa....."

Your shoulders fall and rise
in the rhythm of your thighs
rhythmic is your step,
when you twirl close to me
as I come closer you evade me
and it was only a joke I see.
And the rumba Negro dancers tumba
cumbacumba sounds the rumba
giving fire to the hips
and the partners dance and glide
like a black snake in the night—
bodies sailing free like boats,
and the moving of your beads
looks like comets and like seeds—
when you tumble fall and stumble
you resemble the Mayá
don't lose the rhythm—
"Alaalá-a-lá
alaalá-a-laaa,
And once again
"Alaalá-a-lá
alaalá-a-laaa,
get out your head
the snake is here
the snake Mayá
alaalá-a-laaa,
we dance, we dance the dance of Mayá."

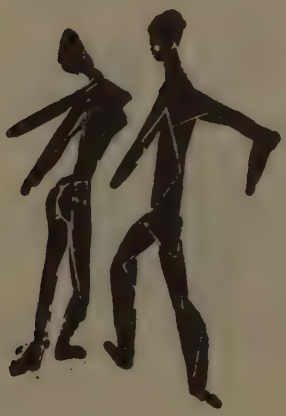
translated by
Miriam Koshland
and Sanders Russel.

AMALIA
BY MARCELINA AROZARENA

Amalia dances and whirls.
— Si, Senor.
Amalia whirls and dances.
— Cómo no.
Amalia dances like flame,
like the tongue of a thirsty beast,
like a writhing snake in torment,
like a palmtree in bloom,
as if her body were a torrent,
as if,
as if,
as if.....
Amalia dances and whirls.
— Si, Senor.
Amalia whirls and dances.
— Cómo no.
Amalia, holy brown woman!
Your almond eyes contain two glowworms shining
in the black stars of your radiant pupils.
lines,
lines,
petrol lines in your hair form it to waves
and copy their sinuous course
in your body to the dance of the Batahola
Cinnamon paints your face
this face
which I love —
to pave the roads
leading
to your turgid hills
your miraculous caves,
here I leave my seed:
how much sweat to cover your hut!
Your aubergine lips bloom
in a calm voice the sounds
for my song flow:
dry is my throat
flower on ardent stems
sweaten my tongue.....
Amalia dances and whirls.
— Si, Senor.
Amalia whirls and dances.
— Cómo no.

Amalia trembles, her feet are "S" es
not "L" 's
her eyes are fishes,
her fingers ten greyhounds
her mouth the fever of sugarcane fields
— trembling she gives them freshness,
her breasts glimmer like golden copper
and I am her mirror in the honey sea.
Amalia dances and whirls.
— Si, Senor.
Amalia whirls and dances.
— Cómo no.
A whirl is her measure
burning in delight,
a whirl the conch shells
dangling on her body.
A whirl her body
gripped and lashed in the beads of her belt,
What madness!
Amalia! Amalia!
Amalia dances trembling
because she fears
her dance will become a festival
and her body and her colour
will provoke
the powerful spirit of Changó.....
Amalia whirls and dances.
— Cómo no!

Translated by
Miriam Koshland
and Sanders Russel.

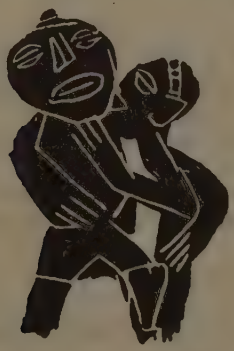


BLACK SONG WITHOUT COLOUR
BY MARCELINO AROZARENA

International Radio Station:
Now that you prepare our multiple struggles
and they diffuse the programme over the antennae of a moment
I come to speak my song with the voice of ALL!
Do we exist? Even if they do not want to know that we DO,
we are the muscle, we are the essence of the joyful echo,
we are the taboo sign for our ravished role,
the shadow gave us a skin to hide our fear,
it is a skin of shocks that our colour knows.
We are the anecdote:
the eternally drunken,
with a drunkenness of whip and forest and song:
in the bars of rhythm the rumba beats rum into our bodies
and the tropics.
The lunatic of the singing islands
— puddles of music in the wide Atlantic meadows —
encase us behind the glass of sextets and songs
to comb the shameless curiosity of tourists.
In the orography of our skin
hills of the hydropical lip,
white teethed valleys
fertile with song,
the defiles of prejudiced revolt
over the ancient sediments of slave offspring.
For the eyelids are heavy with burgeous images
the retina does not grasp the root truth,
our hunger is song
our culture is song
our laughter is song and our tears
song, song,
song in Negroes like a quaver
song in Negroes like suffering oxen
dragging their oppressive music box.
We shall glide around the world on skates of rhythm;
In the moon, cosmic mirror, our treason trembled.
And here we join the chromatic mould
Ninth Symphony of the Revolution
with our unelastic longing
whose sighs overflow to crude sexual excitement.

The Bongó will give voice to us
and we shall scream without sound in the turbulent nights.
Screams without sound.
Elastic, frenetic, with no joy
their echo is without surprises,
they will rob the song of its spiral
to give us a "looping the loop" of joy
whereas, over there, in the hangars without hunger for the future
dreamplanes climb hopes.
Let them fly, friends, their squadrons,
for the distance is ours,
with grief's idle rhythm
the foot chained to the rhythm of omissions
always focused on the banquet of NOW
always alone,
always unknown
and always will our economic ballast (in livery or short trousers)
wait at our door and ask :
How much are you worth?
Dispersing in its musical theme
(black song without colour)
our transmission fades out.
International Radio Station ....

translated by
Miriam Koshland.



CASINO.

BY PAUL NIGER.

Casino Casino
everything in the city
everything in the balconies and terraces
everything in the hips of young girls
everything in the people lying in their windows
everything is Casino.
Casino Casino
From the trombone's piston rises the distant cry
pang-hang
through the trumpet's muzzle hua-huah
into the bitter cave of a saxophone,
a monsoon bubbles from the depth
'Moin Ka viré'
and the orchestra high on glittering platform spits,
palala spits out, the sweet temptations of the Casino.
Here I am,
A colourless official, and push
my intellectual throat through the collar's funnel,
that armour of respectability,
here I am,
Casino, dusty Casino of dusty planks
under my polished shoes.
Casino, Ah Casino,
I shall not dance, I've only come to watch,
to watch the stout, scented negresses dance,
only to watch them dance, (oh the dance is the worst enemy of any kind of prose.)
Poetry, Poetry
I shall not be able to drink of this rum, produced by the sweat
of my rum producing and rum consuming
humiliated race;
these rum distillers, this sugarcane blood
made of sugarcane, this earthly song
daughters of suffering, daughters of work, daughters of the love
of the labourer, this dispossessed, impoverished
enslaved pauper
who yet labours hard
who is yet lazy
and makes music in any conceivable form,
I shall not dance and I shall not drink,
Drinking and dancing is the pastime of uneducated negroes.

I do not eat this blood sausage, this undefined mixture
That makes one hot, because it's so much peppered,
That bewitches one and disarms
when it is served with rum,
when it is served with rhythms.

I shall not eat, I shall not drink, I shall not dance,
my toes lift, do not lift,
my hips swing, do not swing,
my stomach shudders and cramps,
my muscles are tense but they do not move,
Casino, you shall not get me!

In countries of cool climate, people are cool.
But even on the atlantic the erected ship's bow is a symbol.
The white linen on my body: the soul of respectability.
I hardly transpire with the effort of remaining calm,
I hardly sigh in my immobility,
the immobility of my feet,
my dancing black feet,
in my inexplicable dance,
with my partner whom I did not see coming.
in a group which I do not see at all,
in a rhythm I hardly feel,
in a senseless tumult,
in this dust, the dust of the Casino.
Oh my feet, Oh my feet,
Casino I have come!

translated by
Akanji.

ELEGY OF MARIA BELEN CHACON
BY EMILIO BALLAGAS

María Belén, María Belén, María Belén,
María Belén Chacón, María Belén Chacón,
María Belén Chacón, — häi!
In your rounded buttocks was the coming and going
from Camagúey to Santiago,
from Santiago to Camagúey.

The constellation of your curves shall never
again be lit in the sky of the rumba.
What barking bit the tip of your lung,
María Belén Chacón, María Belén Chacón,
What barking has bitten your lung?

It was no barking, no claw,
It was no tooth and no hand.
The pressing iron at dawn
the iron has burnt your lung.

And then on one fine morning,
they carried your beauty to grave,
your laundry and your lung,
your basket and your grace.

Let everybody stop dancing!
And even the black Andreas
has ceased to pick his fleas
and over there the Chinese
who carry their calabashes
shall also be quiet and kiss
the nails on the cross
on the sacred scaffold.
(Deliver us from evil
or sacred mother of God!)

But never again shall my instincts
be reflected in the happy and round
bright mirrors of your buttocks,
and never again will the star
of your shining curves light up
in the sky of the beauty of women.

María Belén Chacón, María Belén Chacón—häi!
María Belén, María Belén,
in your rounded buttocks was the coming and going
from Camagúey to Santiago,
from Santiago to Camagúey.

translated by Akanji.

DRUMS

BY LUIS PALES MATOS

The night is a brood of drums,
I hear them quake in the forest,
their rough throats of hide
have been aroused by the fires.
In the thick brew of the shadows
the eyes of bats are blinking
and thick resounding bodies
are splashing with rhythmic paws.
With sleepy gesture of tadpoles
they raise their weary heads
and the charm of their thundering force
they freely give to the wind.
Lost in the virgin forest
the white man can hear them now.
And unrestricted the tom-tom
pours into the giant night.

Its incantation calls forth
the manifold powers of darkness
the idols of the dance
the totems of the war
the one and thousand daemons
that live in the negro's soul.

Hark, the drums are coming!
Beware, white man, they approach,
to pierce you with daggers of music,
Block up your ears
close all the pores of your soul,
turn back from here!
For if the drum of the dance
hits you in darkness of night
with its terrible poison,
your veins are forever infested.

translated by
Akanji

THE GREAT LOVE OF MONSIEUR MURET

A SHORT STORY BY ADALBERTO ORTIZ

My friend Fernand Muret, the Frenchman, looked like a German. He had terribly blue eyes, short blond hair and an expressionless face. His robust figure gave him the appearance of a wrestler. His manners were abrupt, and when he laughed his laughter sounded ridiculous. He liked strong drinks, and when he was drunk he was quarrelsome. But most of all he liked young mulatto girls and minced meat with onions. He always carried a Moorish dagger on him, which he claimed, he had bought in North Africa in order to enrich his considerable collection of thrusting weapons, and frequently he rode about on a nervous nag, that had become quite stubborn and lean, because it had to run up and down all the time.

Fernand had hardly arrived in this our small Ecuadorian seaside town when he had already made several good friends and a few enemies. As he was wasting money quite carelessly, his friends took him for a millionaire; they constantly sat around him and told everybody that this European was the most important visitor for years.

He did not like to be taken for a German, but he was flattered by the fantastic stories circulated by his enemies, particularly by one Don Bernardo Reyes, landowner of not entirely motgage free lands and father of a very beautiful mulatto girl called Leila. This Don Reyes assured everybody that the said Frenchman was a criminal who had escaped from the Devil's Islands, an international swindler who wanted to lie low for a while or, one never could tell, even a man of the fifth column and a dangerous terrorist. These rumours seemed brilliantly confirmed, because Fernand commanded several languages besides his own, did not hesitate to use force and owned a collection of weapons.

More than one marriageable girl gave him challenging looks. But Fernand was not easy to get: he preferred one whom he liked, not one who offered herself. Besides, he had concentrated his attention already on Leila Reyes, for whom he even kept a nickname, "La Cubana", in readiness.

Leila's room faced the embankment that dominated the river. The slender girl knew that she was beautiful, and showed herself indifferent towards the

stranger at first. One evening, however—she was just facing the mirror—she heard for the seventh time the clattering of hoofs as the Gringo rode past on the freshly strewn road. She went over to the curtains and looked out. The horseman watched her window, but she was quite sure that he could not see her. He looked very warlike and elegant and as white as a filmstar. When he had passed, she looked herself over in the mirror, touched her erect breasts and watched contentedly how tight and provocative her body shimmered through the light tropical dress. Yet something disturbed her, a few details: the too much curled hair and the somewhat wide, blunt nose. Not so long ago she had also quarrelled with her fleshy lips, because she had found them too sensual and seductive—but now she was satisfied with them, after all, they had become fashionable since many Hollywood stars had such lips or painted them like that.

The house was covered with zink and was therefore unbearably hot at noon time. Leila decided to go out and get some fresh air. A light breeze came across the river. A few peasants slept under a Tamarind near the beach, porters climbed up and down the embankment, three women were washing at the river bank and two black boys played with their coconut balls and were betting on the buttons of their shirts. Further down in the mouth of the river, two large ships lay at anchor, and without knowing why, Leila suddenly thought of the Frenchman.

Only now she noticed that many people were bathing on the opposite bank. There was soft sand on that side of the river and only occasional patches of mud. She felt the desire to swim in the fresh stream and called one of the four maids, who were in the house: "Timotea!"—"Madam?" answered a young voice.

"Get my bathing costume and come along!"—"Yes, Madam."

Timotea was a thirteen year old half cast; at the age of five she had been given to the family and now she was Leila's confidant.

As they were crossing the river in the boat, Timotea, who was rowing, said rather shyly: "Have you heard, Madam?"

"Heard what?"

"That the mister Gringo who always rides around the house has given me a letter for you?"

Leila was silent for a while. Then she said: "Where have you got it?"

"Here", said Timotea and pulled the envelope out of her bosom.

But I want to be brief: the relationship between the two created more and more of a stir, as is bound to happen in any small town. Don Bernardo Reyes nearly killed himself with rage, when his wife mocked him: "I am sure you will not dare to tell THIS one: 'Go to hell'! "MMMM".

"I shall never allow my daughter to marry this stray adventurer", he replied.

"They say he has a lot of money", she ventured.

"I don't care a damn about that!" But he lied. He knew that he did care.

For some time, in fact, he had been wondering whether this money might not be the salvation of his heavily mortgaged property. In order not to show that he was yielding, he retired to his poorly cultivated farms and left the decision to his wife.

One day, when they had gone for a walk unmolested, Leila begged the Frenchman to come into the house, and ask for her hand. His request was granted without much hesitation. The girl was not so much in love with him, but it flattered her that other girls envied her this suitor. Apart from other agreeable circumstances this man would give her much lighter children, perhaps even with chestnut coloured hair. She remembered the advice of her much darker mother who said again and again: "You must improve the race, child. That is what I did, when I married your father. Now you must continue the work. And with a certain amount of sadness she added: "One has won half the battle of life if one is born white."

Fernand Muret was very proud to see himself so much loved by the woman of his dreams and so the day of marriage was finally fixed.

Fernand Muret was not the only white stranger in the place. There was a Polish Jew, four Germans, and three Americans who were drilling for oil. Although their countries were practically at war with one another, here on foreign soil the men were united by close friendship. When they heard about the proposed marriage of the Frenchman, they considered him like a kind of traitor and tried to dissuade him from his decision.

"You must be mad, if you want to marry a negress", said one of the North Americans.

"Nothing in the world could make me take one of those", said one of the Germans.

"Neither would I", said the Jew, which was really too much for the Frenchman: "It is incredible that you think like that too! You belong to a persecuted race that is being kicked by the Nazis, like the negroes in the United States. You should be ashamed to share the opinions of those fellows."

"After all we aren't negroes", said the Pole.

Fernand was first furious, then he said ironically,: "What you say merely increases the number of antisemites."

"Let us be serious" said one of the Germans, "if you, an Arian will marry this mulatto girl, that is the end of our friendship."

Fernand said nothing, he took a pitcher and threw it at his head. Blood flew. The other three Germans threw themselves on him in order to tear him to bits. But as he was a strong, pugnacious fellow, he did not defend himself badly, and threw them down repeatedly, while the Americans looked on amused, without taking part. People began to gather in front of the door, but as the fighters looked so alike, somebody remarked: "It's nothing; merely a few drunken Germans beating each other up."

Fernand and Leila went to the register office. Senor Reyes was rubbing his hands happily and his wife, Dona Teresa wept with joy. The old man visualised the son-in-law's money and his wife could see already the blond or redhaired grandchildren.

But happiness never lasts; and a fortnight later the radio announced that the Germans had invaded France. Fernand simply could not believe it; he saw himself facing a catastrophe. The money which his family had sent him regularly from Paris ceased abruptly and he had to cut down so drastically on his expenses that his friends quickly dispersed. He became visibly thinner and as shaky as his old horse. But he comforted himself with the love of his "Cubana". She was his last resort — she and his collection of valuable thrusting weapons. She and minced meat with onions.

The acquaintances of the Reyes family began to lament Leila's unfortunate marriage and they pitied the family because of its connection with such a poor and degenerate stranger.

It was a clear, luminous night. The light of the moon dimmed the light of the stars. Fernand sat dejectedly on a pile of wood in front of the house; thoughtfully he touched the unusual smoothness of his young wife's dark skin and he watched her crinkled hair, whose brilliantine shimmered in the green light of the sky.

"Fernando . . . . ."

"What is it?"

"You know, my father is worried about you."

"I don't quite get you."

"Yes, he says you cannot provide for me any longer, as you don't receive any money from France."

"What a stupidity! I am a man and I can work. Tell that to your father. And I am going to prove it." And he stopped immediately to caress her.

"I believe you," said Leila. "But my parents demand that I leave you. They want me to get a divorce. Daddy says he does not want to bring up the children of a vagabond."

It seemed that the Frenchman had not quite understood, but Leila saw that his brow assumed an expression of dark determination, and she felt frightened. In a sudden outbreak of fury he pulled out the dagger that he always carried on his belt and shouted: "I would kill you rather than give you up." Paralysed with fear Leila felt that the grip of his other hand on her wrist began to loosen slightly. She told herself that his murderous intentions faltered already, even though his eyes were sparkling fire. Then she tore herself away and ran to the house of her parents.

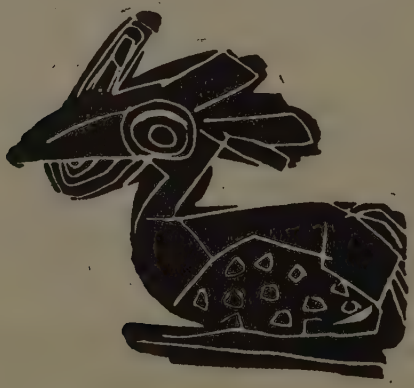
When the authorities and his father in law forced him to leave the scene of his love and his adventures, he sold his horse and went to Guayaquil where he took the post of administrator on a deserted property. It was an old wooden house with zinc roof on uncultivated land. There was not even a farm hand,

only two skeleton like dogs howled all night or barked at imaginary strangers. Once a week a Peón brought victuals from the nearest village.

Fernand had lost faith in everything: his fatherland, the war, his family, his ideals — if ever he had any. He lost interest in everything, even in thrusting weapons, alcohol and minced meat with onions.

He spent whole mornings watching the elephant grass, or he looked down the path along which, once a week, the man came riding with the food. From time to time he took a gun and the dogs, and penetrated a little further into the morass to shoot a duck or a whitebill in order to feed himself and the dogs. All the time he thought of the young and glowing woman, who appeared to him in intimate, tender visions. It seemed impossible to him that she had ceased to love him.

Gradually he became ill. Malaria destroyed his body. Mad images appeared in his feverish dreams; images of French cities, where he had lived carelessly, bursting with the noise of engines and explosions. Huge fires—and his Cubana, very black, very ugly, very wicked, laughed maliciously. Everybody else laughed as well. His German friends from the town pointed at him and the North Americans were laughing too. In between his mother appeared, looked at him with her tender blue eyes, and spoke Spanish. "Strange," he thought, "my mother, surely, does not know Spanish." And his mother said tenderly: "Don't worry, darling, I have come to you against the wishes of my parents and my friends and I shall follow you wherever you wish to go." — "O God, what confusion," he thought. But one day when his mind was clear, he recognised at the foot of his bed, standing besides the Peón who brought the food, Leila the mulatto girl, his Cubana.



CAMARA LAYE'S SYMBOLISM

AN INTERPRETATION OF: "THE RADIANCE OF THE KING" *

BY J. A. RAMSARAN

The chief character in this novel set in Africa is Clarence, a white man, in-quest of the king whose service he wishes to enter. Clarence has been staying at a good European hotel before he moves into an African caravanserai because he is unable to meet his bills at the former place where, as a result, he was despised by his fellow white men. Reduced to looking for some kind of work he is willing to do anything honest as long as he receives "adequate remuneration" for his services. It is in this frame of mind that he, the only white man, joins the huge crowd awaiting the appearance of the King on the esplanade at Adramé. He fails to get to the King because of the crush, and is advised by a haughty beggar to travel South where the King is due to appear next. Clarence invites the beggar and two impudent boys into the caravanserai where the African innkeeper demands payment of Clarence and receives his coat in settlement. Shortly after the company of four has left the caravanserai, the innkeeper appears in the street with public guards and accuses Clarence of having stolen back the coat. He is arrested and tried in a court where he is the victim of a gross travesty of justice. He manages to run away from the courtroom, through a number of intricate passages, led by a young woman who turns out to be the daughter of the judge. There are several other dreamlike incongruities. However, he finally rejoins his companions, the beggar and two impudent boys, and they travel through the forest of thorns and odours, coming upon villages where they feed on the alms given to the beggar. (It is interesting to note the correspondence between this journeying South with Amos Tutuola's stories, especially his *Simbi and the Satyr of the Dark Jungle* where Simbi, like Clarence, is in search of something.) Clarence and his companions arrive at Aziana, where he chooses to remain or rather, is left by the beggar in exchange for a donkey and a woman given him by the old Naba who has a harem of many wives. Clarence prefers to stay in Aziana to leading a strenuous life with the beggar. Now ensues a period of waiting which one fears is going to be as futile as waiting for Godot. He is treated well, and his woman,

* Translated from the French by James Kirkup, Collins, London, 1956, 13/6.

Akissi, provides for all his physical needs, while he keeps on hoping to be of some use to the village, for he is not engaged in any creative work as he understands that epithet, but seems to be frittering away his life in sensuality. By and by Clarence comes to realise his own unworthiness, and finally, in utter humility, he knows that there is no service he can offer to the King; if he is lucky he may be the recipient of some favour from the King. Such is the story in brief, but the meaning of the allegory is not so simple. The fleeting vision which Clarence caught of the King on the crowded esplanade, his experiences at the inn and court trial, his wandering through the forest of the South, and his life at Aziana where he ultimately saw the full radiance of the King and was received by him — all have the quality of a troubled dream — in parts reminiscent of Tutuola's nightmare world, and in parts of Kafka's world of semi-consciousness between dreaming and waking, — especially the wall of thorns, the persistent odour, and the haughty behaviour of the beggar.

He walks for a long time in the forest, struggling against the odour, and against his desire for sleep. He has never tried so hard to keep his eyes open: he would like to see the wall of thorns. And he would like to get to the roots of another mystery — why the beggar behaves as he does. He would like not to fall asleep before solving the mystery. But the mystery is very hard to solve. Each time Clarence is on the point of solving it, sleep plunges everything into darkness again. Yet Clarence is never nearer to a solution than at the moment before he falls asleep. Then there is a moment, only a second perhaps, or perhaps infinitely less, in which it seems everything is going to be made clear at last. But then slumber intervenes, and Clarence falls asleep before he has had time to grasp . . . (What? Who knows?)

He has come to Africa in search of something, he knows not what until he joins the throng on the esplanade at Adramé to catch a glimpse of the King. From that moment he is never at peace until he is received by the King at Aziana. In spite of his assertion: "I am not "just anybody", I am a white man", Clarence is Everyman, but Everyman in search of something having realised that he is lacking that something, and that he does not know all the answers, perhaps will never know all the answers. The beggar's observation: "The white men think they know everything. And what do they know when all's said and done?" is to be taken as a rebuke to any man wise in his own estimation, and spiritually dormant. Clarence and his companions journey painfully towards the South, yet seem to go round in a circle; and paradoxically the beggar says, "The South is everywhere." "Yes," Clarence reflects, "the inferno of the senses is everywhere." This should give them pause who think that West Africa, or any torrid land, is the natural clime for riotous passions and unlicensed sexual indulgence as depicted in some novels of today.

After the forest wanderings Clarence settles in the Vanity Fair of Aziana where the Naba, the eunuch Samba Baloun, and the master of ceremonies become the centre of interest along with the domestic affairs of Clarence. Stripped of his shabby western clothes he dons the native *boubou*, and sometimes goes naked

without any sense of embarrassment—the veneer of civilization, as it were, is stripped and Clarence appears as he really is; and it is in his nakedness that he finally approaches the King. But before this Clarence's repressed desires are given full rein and he lives a Jekyll and Hyde existence without realising it, until the end. But even in Aziana there are people like Diallo, the blacksmith, who is dedicated to his craft. He would make an axe as perfect as he possibly can to offer as his gift when the King does come.

"Will your axe be ready by the time he comes?" asked Clarence. "Probably," Diallo replied. "Anyhow I hope it will be. But what is an axe? I have forged thousands of them, and this one will undoubtedly be the finest of them all. The others will have been no more than experiments I made in order to forge this one perfect one. So that this will be the one of everything I have ever learnt; it will be like my life, and all the effort I have made to live it well. . . . He will accept it, at least I hope he will accept it, and perhaps he will even deign to admire it; but he will accept it and admire it only in order to give me pleasure. After all what sort of pleasure could he take in it? There will always be axes that are finer . . . Yet I go on forging it . . . Perhaps I can do nothing else, perhaps I am like a tree which can bear only one kind of fruit . . . . And perhaps, in spite of having so many faults, because I am like that tree and lack the means to do anything but this; in spite of everything, the King will give me credit for my good will."

It is this last sentence that sticks in Clarence's mind. Half hoping half despairing, he murmurs as the King's glance falls upon him in the final scene, "Alas, Lord, I have only my good will, and it is weak! But you cannot accept it. My good will condemns me: there is no virtue in it." Yet he moves forward and falls upon his knees before the King, but is still not near enough. He is at the end of his seeking, at the end of all seekings when he is held in the King's embrace and enveloped by the mantle of his love. So the quest of Clarence ends in this mystic union after the long struggle between the sensual and the spiritual.

Camara Laye's novel is a strange mixture of these two qualities, the sensual and the spiritual. It may be that the explanation lies in the forces that have shaped his present philosophy. The allegory bears some obvious resemblances to Christian thought, yet one must bear in mind that in *The Dark Child* Laye says that he comes of a Muslim family — his scholarly uncle was a devout reader of the Koran in Arabic. One wonders how much of the mysticism of the Sufis contributes to the allegory of *The Radiance of the King*. It is as though the author is asking whether a synthesis of man's intellectual questioning, spiritual yearning, and an uninhibited enjoyment of life is not possible. In the process of presenting this possibility, however, he confronts the reader with so many pardoxes and contradictions that the result of a first reading is likely to be somewhat confusing. The allegory is not consistently maintained but the main threads can be picked out as I have tried to show. In my attempt to do this I make no pretence that I am right, or that there is only one meaning.

BOOK REVIEWS

AN ANTHOLOGY OF WEST AFRICAN VERSE compiled by Olumbe Bassir, Ibadan University Press, 1957. 5/-.

This anthology of West African Verse is to be greatly welcomed. It is the first time that such an anthology has been published and Dr. Bassir must be congratulated on his pioneering work. There is much that is delightful and fascinating in this anthology. Adeboye Babalola's Village characters are charming translations of Yoruba hunters poems, and the great French poets L. S. Senghor, David Diop and Birago Diop are represented in most readable translations. One cannot expect any anthology to be complete. It is in the nature of such a work to be out of date as soon as published, because new poems are written all the time. Yet we miss some of the more gifted younger poets, who might well have been included in the anthology: Mabel Imoukhuede and Gabriel Okara, for example, from Nigeria and Dei-Anang, Adali-Mortti and Frank Parkes from Ghana. On the other hand, the compiler was not always discerning enough in his choice of poems. A West African poet who uses images like: "woody planes and rosy gardens" does hardly belong into an anthology that represents new West African poetry. Nor does the following pompous bit of imitative writing deserve to be called "West African":

> Why so much misery in this mundane sphere,
> Such wretchedness and so much cause for fear!
> Earth was not purchased for the price of gold,
> Nor did God raise it to be bought or sold;
> Through loving kindness did he make the earth,
> By which he vouchsafed man's peculiar birth;

Some of the verse in this anthology is not poetry at all but a kind versified philosophy, void of any vision and imagery. This is how one poet defines life:

> Or that perfect combination
> Of dependence and self-identification
> In which significant growth begins.

And this is what another poet has got to say about "life":

> It is not now nor then nor hence;
> Nor all that is above nor beneath;
> No, not all these,
> But that which is beyond —
> Beyond our present grasp and scope of life!

Such abstract talk can hardly qualify as poetry nor are the ideas expressed sufficiently deep or original to deserve the name of philosophy.

The outstanding poems are easily those of the French writers. Miss Peatman's translations are very well done. Unfortunately she has the habit of splitting up Senghor's long rhapsodic lines into shorter ones. This rather destroys

the quiet, even flow of Senghor's rhythm and moreover it forces the translator to telescope those lines that cannot easily by split up into two short ones. For example: in "Femme Noir" Senghor's line:

"Tam-tam sculpté, tam-tam tendu qui gronde sous les doigts du Vainqueur"

becomes: "Tom-tom sounding in the conqueror's hands". Thus we lose "sculpté" and "tendu" altogether and "gronde sous les doigts du Vainqueur" is watered down to "sounds in the conqueror's hands." And again: Seghor's line.

"Delices des jeux de l'esprit, les reflets de l'or rouge sur ta peau qui se moire."

becomes telescoped into:

"Like mother-of-pearl your skin shines silver and gold."

Here the sense is only remotely related to the original. But mostly the translation remains close enough to the original and manages to convey something of the spirit of Senghor's poetry.

Whatever the shortcomings of this anthology, we must be grateful that it has been compiled and published at all. At least this will stimulate argument and discussion about West African poetry and that is, after all, what our young writers need most.

AKANJI

TWO NEW PUBLICATIONS IN GERMANY:

"Schwarze Ballade' edited by Janheinz Jahn, Eugen Diederichs 1957.
"Rumba Macumba" selected and compiled by Janheinz Jahn, Carl Hanser 1957.

Herr Jahn has become the interpreter of African writing in Germany. His best selling anthology of negro verse ("Schwarzer Orpheus" Carl Hanser 1954) was followed by three volumes of poetry introducing the work of Senghor, Césaire and Vesey. Now here are the two latest volumes in the growing series of translations from negro authors, which seems to have become Herr Jahn's life work. "Schwarze Ballade" (Black Ballad) is an anthology of prose from Africa and America. Such widely different authors as Peter Abrahams, Amos Tutuola, Adalberto Ortitz and Richard Wright are found side by side in this volume. But as the editor explains, it is not the colour of their skin that is the reason for grouping them together. It is not so much their race, as their belonging to a new cultural circle that binds these authors into a kind of unity. This new cultural unit was termed by Aimê Césaire "négritude", which might be translated as "neo-Africanism". The anthology thus becomes a document testifying to the growth of a new culture, to the rise of a new type of man. This very convincing work reminds us that no such anthology exists as yet in English and that the greatest West African prose writers like Ferdinand Oyono and Mongo Beti remain as yet inaccessible to the majority of English readers.

"Rumba Macumba" is an anthology of Afro-Cuban poetry. These poems, Herr Jahn explains, are another document of the African Renaissance. And though the authors combined in this volume are of very mixed race, some almost white, yet their poetry is African, or rather "neo-African." The folkloristic background of these poems as formed by the Yoruba religious ceremonies that have survived

in Cuba for so many years. We read about Sango and Ogun and Yemoja. In common with traditional African (and particularly Yoruba) poetry we find the frequent use of onomatopaia to describe the sounds of musical instruments and of "nonsense" words that have purely rhythmic significance. The most exciting feature of this poetry is its rhythm. The verse of Tallet, Arozarena, Guillen and Ballagas dances to the rhythms of the Rumba, the Macumba and the Conga. These are profane dances, but they have been developed out of the ritual dances played by the Yoruba "bata" drums, that can be found in Cuba to this day. Janheinz Jahn has succeeded in transferring these rhythms from the Spanish to the German language with unusual skill and ingenuity.

AKANJI

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